



OFFICE OF THE  
**STUDENT**  
ADVOCATE

*Be Informed. Be Connected. Be Empowered.*

# Parent Leadership Toolkit: Tools for Effective Advocacy

441 4<sup>th</sup> Street NW, Suite 723N, Washington, DC 20001 | 202.741.4692



[studentadvocate.dc.gov](http://studentadvocate.dc.gov) |  [student.advocate@dc.gov](mailto:student.advocate@dc.gov) |  @DC\_Advocate



# Overview

---

As advocates, leaders, and community members, parents are capable of providing unique grassroots educational leadership in our schools. We cannot create high-quality schools without the partnership of parents. Empowering the voices of parents in our education system is critical to the success of our students.

Creating and establishing parent organizations are a useful and effective way to organize parent voices and amplify their power in the educational landscape. Effective advocacy involves identifying the purpose and objectives of the work in the communities, understanding the issues and opinions behind the causes, investing in the power of the advocates, and strategically leveraging available tools and skills to maximum utility.

This toolkit provides an outline of how to create and establish a parent organization with the right structure, leadership, and procedures for your school through the following steps:

1. Knowing the Issues
2. Understanding the Terms
3. Getting Started
4. Connecting Advocacy to Action, Goal/Agenda Setting, Establishing Mission & Vision
5. Nuts and Bolts – Establishing Procedures and Operations
6. Funding and Budgeting
7. Building Relationships and Partnerships, Establishing Trust, and Fostering Effective Communication
8. Diversity and Recruitment

# Step 1: Knowing the Issues

# Knowing the Issues

---

**What are the citywide issues? (i.e education, service, etc.)**

**What are the issues that your Ward/neighborhood is dealing with?**

**What issues are most important to you? (i.e. child's schools, etc.)**

# Why is it important to understand the issue[s]?

---

**To recruit allies**

**To understand opponents**

**To win arguments**

**To plan strategy and goals**

Community Tool Box

<http://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/advocacy/advocacy-principles/overview/main>

# When planning strategy & goals

---

**Know where to gather information about the issue [s]**

**Understand where people stand of the issue[s]**

**Understand how your community response to change**

**Know if the issue[s] divides and links the community**

**Do your research**

Community Tool Box

<http://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/advocacy/advocacy-principles/overview/main>

# Step 2: Understanding the Terms

# Advocate

---

## Advocate

(Merriam-Webster Dictionary - <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/advocate>)

- 1: one that pleads the cause of another; *specifically*: one that pleads the cause of another before a tribunal or judicial court
- 2: one that defends or maintains a cause or proposal
- 3: one that supports or promotes the interests of another

### Synonyms:

Campaigner

Defender

Promoter

Proponent

Supporter

Spokesperson

Upholder

# Advocacy

---

## Advocacy

(Merriam-Webster Dictionary - <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/advocacy>)

1. the act or process of supporting a cause or proposal: the act or process of advocating something
2. the action of advocating, pleading for, or supporting a cause or proposal
3. the act or process of supporting a cause or proposal: the act or process of advocating something

### Synonyms:

Advancement	Recommendation
Assistance	Justification
Backing	Urging
Aid	Champion
Defense	Campaigning for
Encouragement	Upholding
Justification	Pleading for
Promotion	

# What is Advocacy?

---

- Advocacy is active promotion of a cause or principle
- Advocacy involves actions that lead to a selected goal
- Advocacy is one of many possible strategies, or ways to approach a problem
- Advocacy can be used as part of a community initiative, nested in with other components
- Advocacy is not direct service
- Advocacy does not necessarily involve confrontation or conflict

Community Tool Box

<http://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/advocacy/advocacy-principles/overview/main>

# Ingredients for Effective Advocacy

---

## Include:

- The rightness of the cause
- The power of the advocates
- The thoroughness with which the advocates researched the issues, the opposition, and the climate of opinion about the issue in the community
- Their skill in using the advocacy tools available
- The selection of effective strategies and tactics

Community Tool Box

<http://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/advocacy/advocacy-principles/overview/main>

# Lobbying

---

*“Lobbying is the practice of trying to persuade legislators to propose, pass, or defeat legislation or to change existing laws”*

From: [http://www.senate.gov/reference/reference\\_index\\_subjects/Lobbying\\_vrd.htm](http://www.senate.gov/reference/reference_index_subjects/Lobbying_vrd.htm)

*“The act of attempting to influence business and government leaders to create legislation or conduct an activity that will help a particular organization.”*

From: <http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/lobbying.html>

# Step 3: Getting Started

# Getting Started

---

## Set the emotional tone

### Know your objective going in

What do you hope to accomplish with this conversation? Develop the desired objectives and what are the non-negotiable points; plan for any obstacles to the desired outcome.

### Don't assume you know everything about the situation - Listen

We do not know all sides of the story; approach this conversation with an open mind and try to understand where the other person is coming from.

### Approach the conversation from the perspective of collaboration

Frame the conversation in terms of both of working together to solve a common problem. Work to define the issues that are common.

### Ensure neutrality

Select a facilitator that can play a neutral role; ask clarifying questions to help a group delve more deeply, but does not weigh in with opinions on what is discussed.



#### Sources:

<https://interfaithhousinginitiative.files.wordpress.com/2016/05/crhi-community-conversation-toolkit.pdf>

Libraries Transforming Communities: Community Conversation Workbook  
[connect.ala.org/node/241879](https://connect.ala.org/node/241879)

# Getting Started

---

## Diversity

A healthy cross-section of voices at the table is vital.

## Safety

Create a safe space by establishing clear rules and ensure every participant is heard.

## Patience

Resist the tendency to rush or to control things. Plan enough time to allow for 'slowness' where good thinking and reflection can take place.

## Listening

Emphasize that everyone has something to contribute, so we must all be able to both hear and be heard.

## Next Steps

Listening creates expectations for action. A measurable set of next steps must become clarified and implemented as follow-up to the conversation.

### Sources:

<https://interfaithhousinginitiative.files.wordpress.com/2016/05/crhi-community-conversation-toolkit.pdf>

Libraries Transforming Communities: Community Conversation Workbook  
[connect.ala.org/node/241879](http://connect.ala.org/node/241879)

# Getting Started: Resources

---

Creating and establishing a parent organization can be a daunting task. The resources below outline exactly what you need to know and do in order to start the process.

[Determining the Right Parent Organization for an HISD School.pptx](#)

[Start a PTO Fact Sheet](#)

[How To Start a PTO](#)

[How Do I Start a PTO](#)

[How to Start a PTO in Your School](#)

[6 Steps to Start a Parent Organization at Your School](#)

[My Role in the PTO](#)

[Suggested PTO Leadership Roles](#)

[PTO Checklist](#)

**Sources:**

<https://interfaithhousinginitiative.files.wordpress.com/2016/05/crhi-community-conversation-toolkit.pdf>

Libraries Transforming Communities: Community Conversation Workbook  
[connect.ala.org/node/241879](http://connect.ala.org/node/241879)

# Step 4: Connecting Your Advocacy to Action

---

## Goal/Agenda Setting – Establishing a Mission & Vision Statement

# Goal-Setting

---

Setting and defining clear goals for your organization are the very foundation of a successful organization. Goals define what the organization is trying to accomplish.

Provides Focus, Increases Motivation, Improves Group Cohesion, Clarifies the Groups Identity, Promotes Buy-in, Provides Mechanism for Accountability, Creates Openness and Transparency, and Ensures Progress is Measurable.

Goals should be:

**S** – Specific (or Significant).

**M** – Measurable (or Meaningful).

**A** – Attainable (or Action-Oriented).

**R** – Relevant (or Rewarding).

**T** – Time-bound (or Trackable).

# Goal-Setting

---

## How to Get Started:

- ① Know the issues and their relevance
- ② Know the strengths and weakness of the group
- ③ Know where you want to be within a specified amount of time
- ④ Determine who is contributing and their role
- ⑤ Establish how the goals will be communicated – what is the messaging?
- ⑥ Build in time to reflect and evaluate if the goals
- ⑦ Develop an Action Plan[s]: action plans describe the specific steps to be taken in order to achieve the goal.

# Organizational Mission

---

“A mission is an organization's purpose or reason for being. The mission answers the question[s]”

① Who are we?

② What do we do?

“The mission is ongoing and does not change unless the core [function of the organization] changes...”

“A mission statement may be rather broad...[but]...provide[s] adequate definition of the organization. The mission does not change or get replaced as problems are solved... it is not as time bounded...”

# Organizational Vision Statement

---

“A vision is an ideal image of a possible and desirable future state of the organization as it carries out its mission.”

“Values are a part of a vision statement...and represents an ideal rather than a specific achievement.”

Principles of Organizational Goal Setting  
<http://www.bdrconsultants.com/goalsetting.pdf>

# Goal-Setting & Action Plan: Resources

---

Setting concrete goals and clear action steps is the very foundation of a successful organization. Goals and action plans define what the organization is trying to accomplish.

[Determining Objectives for Your Parent Organization](#)

[Action Plan Template](#)

[Organizing Parents: Building Family Advocacy Organizations](#)

# Step 5:

## Nuts and Bolts - Establishing Procedures and Operations

# Nuts and Bolts: Resources

---

After establishing the organization, the next step is to maintain procedures and operations in fully functional and collaborative ways.

[School Meeting Marketing Checklist](#)

[Sample Articles of Incorporation](#)

[Bylaws Worksheet and Example](#)

[Conflict Resolution Protocols](#)

[Parent Organization Voting Procedures for Leadership Roles and Bylaws](#)

[Roberts Rules Of Order](#)

[How to Apply for Tax-Exempt Status](#)

[How to Make Your PTO Tax-Exempt](#)

# Step 6: Funding and Budgeting

# Funding and Budgeting: Resources

---

Understanding how funding and budgeting work is essential to establishing and maintaining a parent organization long-term. The resources below will help explain how funding works in DC and how school organizations can advocate for funds.

[DCFPI At-Risk Funding One Pager](#)

[DCFPI DC School Finance Primer](#)

[DCPCSB Report of the Use of At-Risk Funds in PCS](#)

# Step 7: Building Relationships and Partnerships

---

## Establishing Trust and Fostering Effective Communication

*“A community convening (or conversation) is a first step in building relationships and rebuilding trust. [These] dialogues [must]...be part of a sustained community effort” or strategies.*

Source:

<https://citiesspeak.org/2016/08/10/advancing-racial-equity-community-conversations-on-race-justice-and-equality/>

# Discover and Define Ideal Outcomes

---

Discover your ideal outcomes by finishing the following four sentences:

- 1) Coming into this conversation, we see the following needs and challenges...
- 2) Inside this conversation we want people to engage with each other in these ways...
- 3) At the end of this conversation, we want these things to be clear...
- 4) Following this conversation, we want these things to happen...

# How to Engage the Community to Understand

---

## Engage the community to understand:

- People's aspirations for the community.
- People's concerns.
- How people think and talk about a given issue in relation to the community.
- The changes needed to reach our aspirations for the community.
- What people believe we can do, and who they'd trust to take action.

## Community Conversation themes help inform how you:

- Engage the community: Inviting new people opens the door to new relationships.
- Find new partners: Sharing public knowledge creates coalition opportunities.
- Develop strategies: Work on the issue AND build capacity to work together.
- Mobilize resources: Create natural pathways for people to contribute.

# Pathways for Effective Communication

## **Effective Communication 101:** *Fostering an Effective Relationship With Your Child's School*

### **It's A Partnership**

*As a starting point, always consider your relationship with your child's school, a partnership. This will allow you to foster a relationship with your child's teacher that will continue to be nurtured throughout the school year.*

### **Create a Plan of Action for Communication**

*Make sure to share your expectations for communication with your child's teacher. Remember have patience – teachers and school administrators can have a variety of things on their agenda daily, but should always respond to your requests for communication.*

### **Always Follow Up**

*Calling multiple times in a day is not the best strategy for communication but following up the next day, or even in two days, after making a request to communicate with your child's teacher, or school administrator, would be valuable. Make sure to ask when you can expect for your message to be returned.*

# Effective Communication 101: When Conflict Arises

## Clearly Identify the Problem or Concern

*Organizing yourself and being prepared will ensure that you are able to clearly share your concerns.*

## Understand the Rules

*Take time to understand what the school rules and/or expectations are for your child. Also, be clear on the expectations that school has for parents. If those expectations do not sound appropriate do not be afraid to ask questions and offer suggestions.*

## Listen

*Remember to ACTIVELY listen to what other perspectives might be offered.*

## Ask Questions

*Do not be afraid to ask questions – never leave confused, always ask for clarity.*

## Find Common Ground

*There is always room for compromise. Remember the good in reaching a solution that is in the best interest of your child.*

## Create A Plan of Action

*If there is an issue that needs to be more formally addressed, talk with the teacher, or other school personnel about developing a plan to specifically address the issue. Clearly outline each person's responsibilities and ways to follow up.*

## Gather Information, Organize Yourself, Be Prepared

*Talk with your child to get their perspective. Take some time to organize your thoughts prior to communicating with your child's teacher or school – preparing the questions you have for the teacher or school in advance might be a useful exercise. Taking a moment to organize yourself will ensure that you do not forget to raise important points or questions.*

## Suggestions Are Welcome

*In addition to questions, do not be afraid to offer suggestions or options that you feel are in the best interest of your child.*

## Have Patience

*Solutions might not be immediate but having clarity of the timeline for solutions and getting answers to your questions is appropriate.*

## Remove Emotions, Share Facts

*Talking to your child's school about an issue can elicit a host of emotions. Take a moment to breathe before talking to the school – explain your concerns clearly and as calmly as possible. This will ensure that you have collected your thoughts.*



Please visit our website for more useful resources and tip sheets. If you want one-on-one assistance, please feel free to call our office, we look forward to working with you!

Phone: (202)741-4692

Email: [student.advocate@dc.gov](mailto:student.advocate@dc.gov)

Web: [www.sboe.dc.gov/studentadvocate](http://www.sboe.dc.gov/studentadvocate)

Twitter: @DC\_Advocate

# Effective Communication 101: General Tips to Know

## Take Time To Inform:

*Make sure that you clearly, and promptly, inform your child's teacher, and other appropriate school personnel, of any issues your child is dealing with or any concerns that you might have – especially if the issue at hand might impact your child's performance or behavior.*

## Find Ways To Get Involved:

*Parent involvement is not only limited to parent organizations, ask about other opportunities to get engaged at your child's school. Actively engaging at your child's school also provides avenues for communication with not only your child's teacher but also other relevant school personnel. Involvement can also foster positive relationships with other parents and uncover essential information that would be valuable for your child's success.*

## Ask For Help:

*There are times when you need help. It might be help that you need from your child's teacher or school, but also on occasion you might need assistance that the school may not have the resources or capacity to provide. Nurturing relationships with your child's teacher, other parents, or even other individuals might lead you to the organization, agency, or resource that can give you the exact assistance that you, or your child, need.*

**Need help getting started? Consider trying a few of these sentence starters to engage your child's teacher or school:**

- "I'm concerned about my child's..."
- "Help me understand..."
- "Have you considered..."
- "I've noticed..."
- "Her IEP provides her with \_\_\_\_\_. How does that look in the classroom?"
- "It seems as if he has a harder time doing \_\_\_\_ when \_\_\_\_\_."

These sentence starters were informed and adapted from [www.understood.org](http://www.understood.org). Please visit our website for more useful resources and tip sheets. If you want one-on-one assistance, please feel free to call our office, we look forward to working with you!



OFFICE OF THE  
STUDENT  
ADVOCATE

Phone: (202)741-4692

Email: [student.advocate@dc.gov](mailto:student.advocate@dc.gov)

Web: [www.sboe.dc.gov/studentadvocate](http://www.sboe.dc.gov/studentadvocate)

Twitter: @DC\_Advocate

# Building Relationships and Partnerships: Resources

---

Collaboration between and amongst parents, teachers, and school members will catapult organizations from functional to effective.

[Keys to Success in Family-School Partnership](#)

[Nine Truths to Parent Involvement](#)

[Partners in Education: A Dual Capacity-Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships](#)

# Step 7: Diversity and Recruitment

# Diversity and Recruitment: Resources

---

In today's environment, and particularly given the inherent diversity of the DC educational landscape, parent organizations must understand how to work with the range of issues and communities they serve.

[Preparing Teachers to Work With Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Children](#)

[Culturally Responsive Parental Involvement](#)

[Diversity: School, Family, and Community Connections](#)

[Family and Community Involvement: Reaching Out to Diverse Populations](#)

[Getting Off to a Good Start: Positive Interactions with Diverse Families](#)

[Potential Community Partners and Locations for Parent Outreach Activities in Diverse Communities](#)

[Strategies for Success in Local Early Childhood Parent Outreach Activities Among Diverse Cultures](#)

# Diversity and Recruitment: Resources

---

In today's environment, and particularly given the inherent diversity of the DC educational landscape, parent organizations must understand how to work with the range of issues and communities they serve.

[Webinar: New Guidance for Partnering with Diverse Families: The National Framework for Dual Capacity-Building](#)

[Communication Matters: Communicating Effectively with Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Families](#)

[Cultural Competence: Working with Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Families](#)

[Overcome the Language Barrier: Effective Strategies Parent Groups Use to Reach Out to Non-English-Speakers](#)

[Reaching Out to Diverse Populations: What Can Schools Do to Foster Family-School Connections?](#)